

THE MEMORIAL LIBRARY, THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

MADISON 6, WISCONSIN

December 8, 1955

Joshua Lederberg
Genetics Building

Dear Joshua:

In answering your letter I should first of all emphasize that we do not purchase books whose prices are inflated by personal inscriptions. Furthermore, we purchase microfilm copies when the text to be reproduced is both satisfactory on film and the cost of the book is great enough to warrant substituting film. You will notice that I refer to film as a substitute, and I do this because for some purposes readers find film an inconvenience (comparison of texts, for example). In general, the use of microfilm machines is regarded by readers as less satisfactory than having the book itself in hand. Even so we follow this rule: when a book costs more than \$25 we ask the faculty member if a film copy will not do.

Again, we do not purchase books simply because they are first editions. Instead it is the need of the scholar that guides our conduct. If a satisfactory text is available in a modern edition we naturally prefer it because it is less expensive. But frequently texts are not available except in a first edition, and in sheer number these far exceed those that have been reprinted. Furthermore, we must not assume that all of these "first editions" (or second or third editions, when these are more important than the first) are \$1,000 or even \$100 books. Week after week we purchase important and rare books for less than \$15.00.

Finally, I would like to put a question to you which I have found has convinced others. Let's take your Newton example. We have Newton in inexpensive editions. Are scholars willing to have the first editions of Newton disappear altogether? Eventually, these editions come to rest in libraries, sometimes as gifts, but more often, to be acquired and preserved they must be purchased. Do we not have a responsibility along with other libraries to do our share? And if the history of science is one of our special interests should Newton not be our special responsibility?

But lacking unlimited public funds, we cannot fully shoulder our responsibilities. We need help from private

sources, and that is why the brochure on Books, Science and Technology was printed.

I realize that this does not constitute a complete argument in favor of rare books, but this I consider unnecessary by reason of the friendly note of your letter. I am sure I do not need to tell you about the importance of old books in the history of science, and you in turn can be sure that we have not and will not purchase books except as they are relevant to the research and instructional program of the University..

Yours very truly,



Louis Kaplan
Associate Director

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